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REVIEWS

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Renaat Declerck (in collaboration with **Susan Reed** and **Bert Cappelle**), *The grammar of the English verb phrase*, volume 1: *The grammar of the English tense system: A comprehensive analysis*. (Topics in English Linguistics 60-1.) Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. Pp. vii + 846.¹

Reviewed by Nikolas Gisborne, University of Edinburgh

There is no comprehensive grammar focusing on the English verb phrase, although there is an extensive treatment of it in Huddleston & Pullum (2002), as well as in the earlier Quirk grammars (Quirk et al. 1972, 1985). The book under review is the first volume of *The grammar of the English verb phrase*, and it focuses on the semantics of tense, taking this to be part of the verb phrase itself and not, as in some frameworks, to inhabit its own functional projection; more on this issue below. The verb phrase, however, is defined to include auxiliary verbs as well as main verbs. Renaat Declerck is very well qualified to offer such a volume, having published extensively on the semantics of the verb phrase, especially tense, since the 1970s. This volume is one of four which will together make up the full grammar. According to the cover material, the volumes still in preparation will ‘deal with mood and modality, aspect, and voice’.

Declerck takes up a serious and difficult challenge: how should we understand the linguistic representation of time, and how should we understand interactions between different linguistic expressions of time? These are really challenging questions, and the author takes us through several difficult thickets of data.

The book contains fourteen chapters, which we can think of as forming four groups. The first group is made up of chapters 1 and 2. This pair of chapters lays out the intellectual terrain and establishes the context for the rest of the book. Chapter 1, ‘Introduction’, takes the reader through the book’s aims and organization; relevant linguistic terminology; the kinds of meaning that verbs can express; tense vs aspect; situations; *Aktionsart*; telicity; and boundedness. Chapter 2, ‘Towards a theory of tense and time’, distinguishes between tense and time; introduces the notion of ‘time sphere’ (‘one of the two main divisions of time reflected in English tense morphology, namely “past” and “non-past”’; p. 822); asks how many tenses English has; discusses temporal adverbials; and introduces the notions of ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ tenses. Together, chapters 1 and 2 occupy 170 pages.

¹ The book’s cover has it that the book was written by Renaat Declerck in ‘*cooperation* with’ the other authors, whereas the title page says ‘in *collaboration* with’. In this review I treat the book as Declerck’s. I would like to thank Ben Shaer for comments on an earlier version, and Renaat Declerck for clearing up various misunderstandings.

The second group of chapters consists of chapters 3–7, which all concern absolute tenses. An absolute tense is a tense which relates the time of the situation directly to the ‘temporal zero point’ or t_0 , which is normally the time of speech and functions as an orientation time. Declerck says on p. 117: ‘The temporal zero-point is the most basic (unmarked) orientation time in the English tense system, as it is the only orientation time that is by definition given (assumed known).’ The titles of these chapters are transparent: chapter 3, ‘The absolute use of the present tense’; chapter 4, ‘The absolute past tense’; chapter 5, ‘The absolute use of the present perfect’; chapter 6, ‘The present perfect *vs* the preterite in clauses without temporal adverbials’; chapter 7, ‘Absolute tense forms referring to the post-present’. By the end of this second group of chapters we are less than half way through the book.

Declerck is primarily interested in the interactions of different means of marking time in language, which is why the next two groups of chapters, 8–11 and 12–14, take up the largest part of the book. The former group is about the relative tenses; the latter deals with the interactions between tenses and adverbials. The relative tenses do not anchor the time of the situation to t_0 but to some other time of orientation. For example, ‘the past perfect is a relative tense, because it relates its situation time as anterior to an orientation time which is not t_0 ’ (p. 153). In order to describe these chapters I need to introduce some of Declerck’s theory. Declerck claims that tense is organized in terms of two *time-spheres* (p. 147), past and non-past, which are conceptual divisions of time. The past time sphere ‘is conceived of as a timespan of indefinite length which lies wholly before t_0 and is disconnected from t_0 ’. The present time sphere is conceived of as a timespan of indefinite length which includes t_0 . The time spheres are divided into four *time zones*. The past time sphere corresponds to the past time zone. The present time sphere corresponds to the pre-present, present and post-present time zones. The difference between the past and the pre-present is described on pp. 150–1: although both are used to describe situations which occur wholly before t_0 , the present perfect has a temporal focus on the present, whereas in the past tense the temporal focus is on the past.

Chapter 8 is called ‘Temporal domains and relative tenses: theoretical foundations’ and is an introduction to the rest of the book. In this chapter, Declerck sets up the distinction between absolute and relative tense described briefly in chapter 2. Chapter 9, ‘Temporal subordination in the various time-zones’, discusses how we can ‘expand’ the different absolute temporal domains. This chapter explains that this kind of temporal expansion involves a shift of temporal perspective when the domain is established by the present perfect or future tense, and that it is not possible to expand a domain created by a present tense form. Chapter 10, ‘Two tense systems with post-present reference’, is a bit complicated because a post-present domain is established by an absolute future or a ‘futurish’ tense form (such as *be going to*) and can be expanded by a ‘pseudo-absolute’ tense form, such as *didn’t pull* in *Next time, everyone who didn’t pull his weight during the race will have to pay a fine afterwards*. This chapter also discusses ‘absolute relative tenses’ like the future perfect in *By the end of the week, I shall have written 100 pages*. Chapter 11, ‘Tense choice determined by temporal

focus', is about situations where 'the discourse switches from focus on one time-zone to focus on another'. Examples include *I was going to help you tomorrow*, where the implication is that the past intention is no longer valid.

The final group consists of three chapters. Chapter 12, 'Preterite *vs* present perfect in clauses with temporal adverbials', is concerned with these tenses in combination with different classes of temporal adverbial. Declerck is interested in how the presence of a temporal adverbial interacts with the choice of either the past tense or the present perfect. The interactions are described in terms of a taxonomy of different temporal adverbials, described semantically. Chapter 13, 'Adverbial *when*-clauses and the use of tenses', argues that there are nine unmarked categories of temporal relation between the time of a *when*-clause situation and the time of its superordinate clause situation, as well as some more marked options. A process of temporal binding is described, which may be direct or indirect. There is also discussion of 'sloppy' use of particular tenses. Chapter 14, 'Adverbial *before*-clauses and *after*-clauses', is concerned with the use of tenses in sentences modified by *before*- and *after*-clauses, and is also interested in the relationship of the tense in the matrix clause to that in the adverbial clause. The interaction between the tenses and *before*-clauses relies partly on a taxonomy of semantic differences which the *before*-clause can establish. Both *before* and *after* are understood in terms of an orientation time and an anchor time.

This book is a careful, fine-grained and detailed account of the intricacies of the English tense system. There is a wealth of analysis of the English tenses, their interactions, and their interactions with other temporal elements. The book is closely argued, and generously exemplified. (The data are largely constructed which, given the nature of the task, is entirely appropriate. Other data are drawn from the internet, corpora and various books. The constructed data are to the point and the naturally occurring data well chosen.) And Declerck's thorough treatment of the English tenses is located in a theoretical perspective which is consistently and rigorously applied.

In some ways, the book is well signposted. There is a skeletal table of contents but each chapter gets its own analytical table of contents, so it is easy to find topics within the chapters. Apart from chapter 2, the chapters also have an abstract immediately following the table of contents, and all of the chapters end with a useful summary. There is a thoughtful exploitation of colour: blue print is used for section headings, and blue small capitals are used to signal when a new technical term is introduced. Several (though not all) sections have an initial summary argument marked off in a blue text block. There is a large glossary running to seventy-one pages. There is a good index. The examples, which often have to range over stretches of discourse, are indented and in a smaller font, so it is straightforward to see the difference between examples and text.

However, there are still some real signposting problems. The examples are mostly not numbered, which makes it hard to cross-refer. The policy appears to be that when an example has to be picked up and discussed at length in the text, and perhaps contrasted

with some other example, it is numbered, but when it is illustrative of a general point it is not. I would have preferred a consistent habit of numbering every example. Another signposting problem is the absence of an independent list of figures or even a list in each chapter's analytical table of contents. The first diagram appears in chapter 2; there are no diagrams in chapters 3 and 4 and then the diagrams reappear in chapter 5. This signposting problem intersects with a problem of exposition: the initial diagram is explained, but when diagrams return in chapter 5 they are not described in prose. Because the diagrams encode increasingly difficult information as the book moves on, it would have been helpful to have had more advice on how to read them, and to have been able to cross-refer between diagrams.

As I have said, the book is comprehensive and thorough. It is true Declerck concentrates on his own framework in describing the meaning of tenses, and thus omits discussion of the interesting results of other frameworks, particularly those such as Discourse Representation Theory (e.g. Kamp and Reyle 1993) which have investigated the relations of tenses across sentences. Given the book's goals, this is probably a reasonable omission. Less straightforward, perhaps, is the author's choice to devote almost the entire book to the meanings of tense and temporal markers, leaving little room for discussion of the syntax of tense, which is a topic that has figured prominently in the recent literature – see, for example, Guéron and Lecarme (2004). In a book called *The grammar of the English tense system*, I would have thought that the syntax of tense should receive more attention: after all, in P&P syntax (ordinary) clauses are headed by a Tense Phrase, and the subject condition in English is a rule about tense. Perhaps more importantly, I am left unsure how Declerck would handle mismatch phenomena such as *I would like coffee*, where the situation being temporally located is in the future relative to the time of the utterance, but *would* is morphologically a past form. He says (p. 423), 'a single semantic (= tense structural) meaning can be ascribed to the past tense morpheme: the past morpheme makes it clear that the situation time of the situation referred to belongs to a domain whose central orientation time is located in the past time-sphere'. This formulation seems to exclude the possibility of mismatch.

The descriptive apparatus of the book is based on the 'descriptive theory' (p. 4) of Declerck (1991). I think that the best benchmarks are probably Lyons (1977), Palmer (1988) and Quirk et al. (1985). Some of the apparatus seems somewhat cumbersome – given that there are straightforward textbook treatments of tense and lexical aspect (or *Aktionsart*), for example in Kearns (2000), which cover a lot of the same territory as this book but in far less space, I am not sure why it was not possible to be more economical here. At times, I found myself overwhelmed by the wealth of terminological distinctions, not all of which were familiar; and I found myself regretting that there are not clearer anchors to the literature (again, I come back to this point below). I have spent some time wondering whether Declerck's analysis of tense, which is not formalized, could be modelled formally.

In his discussion of the bibliographical apparatus of Huddleston & Pullum (2002), Aarts (2004) writes: 'A serious flaw of this book is the very sparse bibliographical

information that it supplies.’ He adds, ‘Doing research is to a large extent a matter of disentangling and critically evaluating different viewpoints and strands of thinking, and it is of real importance for readers to be able to trace the provenance of the analyses described. It is also essential for grammar instructors to be able to direct their students to books like this, which, ideally, have extensive bibliographies where references to publications on all areas of grammar are included.’ I agree wholeheartedly. Sadly, the reference list in *The grammar of the English tense system* runs to just two pages. There are only three references from the current decade, one to a volume by Declerck and one of his collaborators on the present volume, and another to an undergraduate introduction to linguistics (Brinton 2000). Declerck writes (p. 4): ‘Grammars are typically written without systematic references to the linguistic literature . . . and without discussion of conflicting analyses. This applies to this grammar even though it aims to be a linguistic study as well as a grammar.’ I find this to be an unfortunate decision, especially given the earlier claim on the same page, ‘The scientific nature of this work means that this is not just another grammar of English meant to be used as a handbook and basically restricting itself to bringing together a number of relevant data which have been revealed and studied in the linguistic literature on the English tense system. It is meant to be a thorough study of that tense system.’ But who is the audience? Is it the reader of a monograph, who might well expect a major bibliographical apparatus, or is it the reader of a grammar, who may be content – though I doubt it in the case of a language as thoroughly described as English – to take the book on trust? Either way, in any large book I might read, I want two kinds of signpost that are missing here: a signpost to what the alternative arguments might be, and a signpost to the relevant literature.

Here is a case in point: on pp. 102–8, Declerck argues that English does have a future tense in a subset of WILL + infinitive constructions. Declerck’s argumentation is subtle – he acknowledges that there is always a ‘modal’ element in the meaning of the future, because the factuality of a future expression is always moot, but he then points out that we can use the future to make hard-and-fast predictions, as in *The sun will rise between 6.30 and 7 tomorrow*. He is careful to distinguish future tense from futurish forms. But Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 208–10) disagree: they argue that English has no future tense. Students who find both Huddleston & Pullum (2002) and the book under review in the library will know that linguistics is an argumentative discipline and they will know how to read a monograph, which will typically state what the alternative position might be and where to find it. But without bibliographic pointers this book makes the task of evaluating competing positions harder than it needs to be.

However, criticism is not an appropriate note to end on. This is a monumental work of scholarship, and it draws on Declerck’s considerable achievements over the decades. There is a wealth of data which have been carefully and closely examined, laying open several important distinctions. This book spells out its intellectual assumptions, and follows them through consistently. It is coherent, and marked by a clear understanding of the relevant issues and questions. Although I have disagreements with the model, I have learnt a tremendous amount from reading it, and it will repay continued attention.

The physical book is handsome and well made. It is sewn, not glued, and one thing I am very grateful for is that the footnotes appear on the page where they are relevant. I hope that this is becoming the norm.

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Terttu Nevalainen, Juhani Klemola and Mikko Laitinen (eds.), *Types of variation: Diachronic, dialectal and typological interfaces*. Amsterdam and New York: John Benjamins, 2006. ISBN 978-90-272-3086-7.

Reviewed by Bernd Kortmann, University of Freiburg

This volume grew out of an international symposium held at the University of Helsinki in October 2003. Its major aim is to discuss linguistic variation, more exactly morphological and syntactic variation, from three angles (historical linguistics,